Connecticut’s Educator Workforce Now More Diverse With Comprehensive Center Support

In recent years, widespread commitment by leaders across Connecticut—extending from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to the State Board of Education to the state legislature—has put the state on course to diversify its workforce by increasing the number of educators of color. Initially, a combination of unprecedented statewide investments, clear expectations, and accountability for progress positioned the CSDE to move forward in this area. However, even with momentum and resources in hand to apply toward the goal of increasing the number of educators of color, the challenge soon became how to best position districts and schools to achieve these results in practice and at scale.

The CSDE called upon its federally funded technical assistance partner, the Region 2 Comprehensive Center (R2CC), to help increase capacity in the areas of personnel, resources, organization, and policy within the state and its districts between 2019 and 2023.

A substantial multiyear effort ensued, including intensive R2CC coaching of district teams, developed based on learnings from a pilot in which districts were able to refine state guidance—all detailed previously in Preparing Connecticut’s State and District Leaders to Recruit and Sustain Educators of Color.

The work has yielded promising results:

Districts that refined their data collection and analysis; addressed implicit biases in hiring and selection processes; and rooted coherent, localized strategies in research and evidence achieved notable increases in numbers of educators of color.

Learn more below about why this work matters and how the CSDE’s partnership with R2CC contributed to these gains. Also discussed are statistical evidence of progress, lessons learned that are relevant to others doing this work, and what is next in Connecticut.
Diversifying the teacher workforce has become a key priority from coast to coast.

Students who have at least one strong connection with a teacher who shares their racial or ethnic background are far more likely to become interested in learning. Research conclusively shows that students of color— in fact, all students—benefit academically, socially, and emotionally from having an opportunity to learn in classrooms led by teachers of color.

However, while the majority of U.S. students are children of color, only 20 percent of teachers are people of color. Furthermore, 40 percent of the nation’s public schools do not have a single teacher of color on record, Ed Trust reports.

Connecticut has made great strides. In 2016, the legislature required Connecticut’s school districts to increase teacher diversity. In addition to this mandate, the state focused staff, finances, and partners like the R2CC on helping school districts and institutions of higher education achieve this goal.

Connecticut invested in scholarships, a teacher residency program, paid apprenticeships, and localized recruitment and training partnerships involving community organizations and teacher preparation programs that were designed to cultivate diverse future teachers.

With R2CC’s support, the state also created an Educator Diversity Dashboard, a publicly available online platform that allows visitors to track relative progress and drive improvements across districts on numbers of educators of color as compared to numbers of students of color.

In addition, 11 Connecticut school districts volunteered to have teams of district leaders—including human resources and talent professionals; school administrators; diversity, equity, and inclusion professionals; and teachers—evaluate the actions their districts had been taking to diversify the workforce to determine whether they were working and, if they were, to what degree and why.

R2CC coaches led these teams through a series of virtual sessions during which they had to collect key data, identify the reasons educator diversity was lacking at each school, and figure out how to overcome these obstacles through evidence-based solutions.

The results are encouraging. Over a 2-year period beginning in the 2020/21 school year, nearly all the participating districts achieved overall net gains (accounting for both new hires and departures) in numbers of educators of color:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2020 Educators</th>
<th>2023 Educators</th>
<th>Net Gains</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Hartford</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meriden</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>101</td>
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<td>Hamden</td>
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<td>78</td>
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<td>South Windsor</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrington</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
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- East Hartford grew from 92 educators of color to 105.
- Hamden grew from 65 to 78.
- Meriden grew from 75 to 101.
- South Windsor grew from 32 to 52.
- Torrington grew from 19 to 33.
The CSDE and R2CC now plan to look closely at the specific strategies used by these districts to achieve these gains, noting that a combination of both retention and recruitment strategies likely played a role.

"We have greatly appreciated R2CC’s support over the years," noted Dr. Shuana Tucker, Chief Talent Officer for the CSDE, “to help us break down existing barriers that keep people from the profession, and work to get all the right people at the table, their voices being heard.

There are takeaways relevant to other jurisdictions looking to diversify their educator workforce.

“Connecticut’s progress shows it is possible for states to overcome what can be hidden hurdles that stand in the way of students learning from the vast array of talent in this country,” notes Saroja Warner of R2CC.

R2CC reports three key takeaways that may be relevant to other states and districts:

1. First, participants were often surprised to learn that it was not always evident which data they needed to focus on in order to identify exactly why there was little diversity among those hired and retained. For example, some naturally assumed they should be measuring—and then filling—the chasm between a school’s percentage of teachers of color and the comparable percentage of students of color.

   “However, this approach does not unearth where teachers of color are and where they are not,” said Warner.

   By breaking the data down further, for example, districts might see more teachers of color in elementary schools than in high schools or find the gap specific to Black, Latine, or multilingual teachers. Alternatively, there may be a weakness in the way teachers are recruited, interviewed, selected, or hired, such as candidates falling off at the interview or selection stages.

   “One can only determine the root cause of a lack of diversity through looking at each race, at each point in the cycle,” noted Warner. “The same applies to analyzing retention numbers that help explain why teachers of color leave the profession.”

2. Second, the sessions included substantial myth-busting around collecting demographic data. Participants were often surprised to learn that school systems can legally ask for such data even if candidates are not required to provide them.

   “We encouraged systems to be clear about why they are asking—because of commitment to equal employment opportunity—so candidates can make informed decisions about providing demographic data,” said Warner.

3. Third, district teams realized that increasing educator diversity could not be an add-on strategy but instead needed to be part of a coherent overall district approach to establishing safe, rigorous learning environments in which all students see themselves reflected, valued, and affirmed.
With the support of R2CC, participating districts developed plans to meet their own unique contexts drawing from research and evidence-based strategies offered in the state’s guidebook for hiring and selection titled *Creating a District Plan to Increase the Racial, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity of Your Educator Workforce* and a toolkit for district and school leaders, *Creating an Action Plan and Sustaining Efforts to Increase Educator Diversity*.

**There is more to do in Connecticut.**

There is still a great need to further diversify the teacher workforce in Connecticut and in most other states. Although the state has further to go, “clear expectations and accountability were critically important to this success,” said Warner, noting that in 2023, the legislature went a step further in requiring all 160 districts in the state to submit plans for review and approval to increase diversity by May 2024.

Connecticut’s preliminary pockets of success are also likely due to a “willingness on the part of school districts to deeply reflect and move forward anew,” according to Sarah Barzee, Director of R2CC.

To create an environment in which change is possible, leaders must first illustrate “how focusing scarce resources on building a representative population—where all are trained to be culturally responsive—creates more opportunities for all children to learn and succeed,” concluded Warner. “The end goal is broader trust with the entire community. Once a love of learning is ignited among children, it spreads, and grows, to peers across the room and to the community at large.”

R2CC is continuing to partner with the CSDE to support many more districts as they prepare to submit Increasing Educator Diversity (IED) plans to the state under the mandate established by Public Act 23–167 § 10.

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